

Trained Nursing.

BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK.

From the very earliest times the occupation of the nurse has been recognised as honourable, humane, and above all feminine, because to tend the sick and the wounded and to soothe the suffering has ever been and must always be pre-eminently women's work. So it is no less strange than true that it is only within the last forty years that it has been admitted that nursing is, or should be, a skilled calling, demanding from those who would follow it a lengthened course of careful training and special education, as an essential preliminary to the right understanding of the duties which the care of the sick involves, and to the best performance of these duties, and of the orders given by the doctor, in any and every case of illness. There are many explanations given for this late development of the scientific side of nursing, but it is probably largely due to the fact that, from various social and economic causes, a constantly increasing number of educated gentlewomen have been led in late years to adopt the calling as a definite life work. And this, either to earn their bread by services more congenial than those of teaching, to escape a life of *ennui* or empty idleness at home, or perchance in the hope of doing some little good for humanity in their day and generation. Whatever be the cause, the fact is undoubted that there are now few families amongst the upper and middle classes which do not count one or more nurses amongst their number. And this influx of educated women into the work will by itself explain the rapid improvement which has taken place in the status, the training, and therefore the usefulness, of nurses, and the increased estimation in which they are now held by the public at large. At present, however, the very popularity of the work, and the increased confidence which doctors place

in nurses, is, although it may seem paradoxical to say so, doing undoubted harm to the cause. Because in this delightfully free country of ours, where it requires almost a revolution to make the Government take any fresh step in governing, any woman, however destitute she may be of knowledge, or of character, or of both, can, without let or hindrance, term herself a trained nurse, can obtain employment in that capacity, and can, as may be easily understood, by her ignorance cause great suffering, if not danger, to the sick before her incapacity is discovered. It is well known that there are now hundreds of such women at work in our midst, and unless some check can be placed upon them, it is a moral certainty that the greater demand there is for the services of trained nurses, the larger will be the number of these untrained women, who will offer themselves to supply the need. Happily, however, there has now been commenced a system of registration of trained nurses, which will, it is hoped, in time, afford the public the means of discerning with ease and certainty whether any given woman is qualified to attend upon the sick efficiently or not. The same system has been enforced by law for medical men, for lawyers, and others, for many years, with complete success in differentiating the true professional man from the quack; and there is no reason to doubt that similar success will be obtained in the case of nurses.

It is equally easy to prove that the present popularity of the work is rather a disadvantage than otherwise, because hundreds of women who by temperament, health, or strength are utterly unfitted for the calling, are by the force of fashion led to undertake it. Such obtain admittance to hospitals as paying probationers in large numbers, and after serving in that capacity for a short three months or so, grow tired and retire, or perforce have to leave to make room for others of the same class, having just acquired that little knowledge which is such a very dangerous thing. In many instances these thereafter practise amongst their kinsfolk and acquaintance as fully trained nurses, and by their presumed knowledge and yet frequent mistakes, bring no small discredit upon the calling. Others again, obliged to work for their livelihood, and yet too delicate to bear the stress of the hard work incidental to training, are compelled to leave the hospital after a very short period of education.

And yet these also can, and in many cases do at once commence to act as private nurses, and as they can prove that they have been in actual hospital work, their services are eagerly accepted. Registration of only those who have undergone a regular and systematic training will it is hoped in due course prevent this abuse. In any case, it is certain that much more order and system will in future be brought into the training of nurses generally throughout the country than has hitherto been in force. It is therefore of no small importance to parents and guardians, and to all who desire to join the profession of nursing, to obtain a clear and uncoloured idea of the nature of the training, and how it can be gained, and of the opportunities for gaining a livelihood which nursing affords. In the first place, then, it is all important that the would-be nurse should be of robust health, that she should be of good height and bodily strength; for without these physical advantages she is greatly handicapped at the outset, if indeed the deficiency does not bring about a rapid breakdown. The hours are so long, the constant sight of suffering and death is so depressing, the atmosphere of hospital wards is so necessarily vitiated, that a nurse must possess the strongest nerves, and that even temper which can only be exhibited by those who possess a perfectly healthy mind in a perfectly healthy body. Few general hospitals now take probationers or pupils until they are twenty-three or twenty-four years old, but in many children's hospitals throughout the country they are admitted as young as nineteen or twenty. It is not a bad thing for the training to be begun in this way by a year or so spent at a good children's hospital, because the period of training given by different general hospitals varies very greatly, some giving one year, some two, and some three. The British Nurses' Association adopted a very widely expressed belief when it decided upon three years as the minimum length of education necessary to efficiently train a nurse. The aspirant nurse would do wisely to make minute inquiries as to the various facilities given for the training of nurses in the various hospitals in her neighbourhood, and then make written application to the matron of one or more of these, asking for the conditions and possibilities of admission, as the number of candidates for probationerships at the larger provincial and London hospitals is always greatly in excess of the vacancies. Very good children's hospitals in

London are the Victoria at Chelsea, the Evelina in Southwark, the East London at Shadwell, and the North Eastern Hospital at Hackney. In the provinces, the children's hospitals at Pendlebury, near Manchester, at Liverpool, and at Nottingham stand deservedly high in professional reputation, while in Scotland, that at Aberdeen offers very great advantages. Hospitals for general training include St. Bartholomew's, Guy's, the Middlesex, University College, St. Mary's, the Royal Free, and the Metropolitan Free, in London; the Manchester, the Newcastle, the Leicester, and the Birmingham Workhouse Infirmarys, the Cambridge, the Lincoln, the York, and the Sussex County Hospitals, and many others, throughout the country. In Scotland, those who could obtain a training at Aberdeen, or in Ireland at Sir Patrick Dun's, or the Adelaide Hospitals, Dublin, might consider themselves very fortunate. The best course, however, for any one desiring to be trained as a nurse to adopt, would be to write to the matron as above advised, and if possible also find some friends who will exert themselves to forward her wishes, because, as has been previously said, the competition for admission to the nursing ranks is now very keen. But having gained an appointment as probationer at a large hospital she will find everything very new, and probably very different indeed from her anticipations of the life and work of a nurse. She will share a small bed-room with one or two other nurses, or may perhaps have a little curtained or match-boarded cubicle to herself. At six o'clock each morning, winter and summer, she will be awoken, and must hurry through her toilette in order to be down in the nurses' dining-room for breakfast at 6.30, and then into the ward to which she is appointed by seven o'clock. Here she will at once begin with the assistance of a senior nurse to make the patients' beds. As she will probably have fourteen or fifteen of these to do, and as some of the patients cannot be taken out of bed, and therefore have to be carefully raised now and then during the process, while all the others must be lifted out and wrapped in blankets during the process, some idea may be formed of the amount of hard work which is entailed in the performance of this duty. It is probably hardly finished when the sister or head nurse enters the ward to read the morning prayers, at eight o'clock. The senior nurse will then busy herself

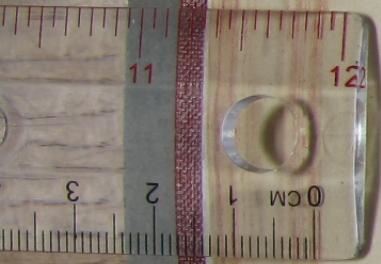
with the preparation of the patients' lunches, while our probationer is set to sweep the ward from top to bottom, the ward-maid or servant following in her wake with a polishing brush and flannel. Then she dusts the tables and the patients' lockers, and finally thoroughly cleans the lavatory.

In fact, the first essential of modern nursing is the maintenance of the most scrupulous cleanliness, and the first lesson which is impressed upon the new worker, and the chief duties which she has to fulfil day after day and week after week, is the carrying into practice of this great and initial principle. Some who imagine that there is a royal road to learning in nursing are apt to cavil at this hard work, to misunderstand its cardinal value in precept and practice, and even to consider it somewhat derogatory to their dignity. But these have mistaken their vocation, and are only fit for the company of "ladies" in the modern acceptation of that term.

All this done, it will be time to assist in giving the patients their next meal, and then our nurse must hastily swallow a cup of milk, coffee, or cocoa, and some bread and butter or jam, and then go to her room to dress for the day. By half-past nine she must be back on duty, must have the flowers and plants dusted and watered, and brought into their places about the wards, and then prepare all the dressings, &c., which may be required for the patients. By that time the resident staff, the house physician, and his students will have arrived. The sister, nurse, and probationer will attend them from bed to bed, the two former undressing the patient, while the probationer follows after, helps the patient to re-dress, and makes his bed tidy again. By twelve o'clock the doctors will have departed, and then the patients have to be served with dinner, and many of them also assisted therewith. By half-past one this is probably done, and then our probationer is sent across to the nurses' room for her dinner. She is tired, and if the meal is not palatable it is possible she may go back to her ward more tired, because more hungry, than ever. This is one of the most important points in hospital life—the way in which the employés are catered for. More illness probably occurs amongst nurses from sheer want of nutrition than from any other cause. It is not that sufficient good food is not provided by the Institution, but it is oftentimes not remembered in practice that the exhausting work makes the appetite capricious,

and that want of out-door exercise impairs digestion. Both these factors are at work in the case of nurses, and if there is much sameness in their dietary, and especially if the cooking is defective, it cannot be wondered at if in frequent cases the meals are untouched. It is a most difficult problem how to please a jaded appetite without being extravagant of the hospital finances, but is a problem which, with care, and thought, and keen supervision of the cook, and as great punctuality as possible on the part of the nurses, so that the well-cooked viands shall not become cold before they are served up, is quite possible of solution. How all-important this apparently trivial matter is for the health of the staff, for the efficient working therefore of the whole hospital machinery, cannot be adequately expressed.

Well, our probationer has—unless she has a couple of hours now off duty for recreation or exercise—to go back in her ward by two o'clock, when the visiting staff make their rounds. The same routine duty of attending them from bed to bed again takes place, and the observant nurse can learn very much by attention to the lectures now given upon each case to the students. By four, the ward will be probably clear, and then the patients have to be supplied with their teas. That over, the nurses in turn go to their tea, and then, in most hospitals, is a brief time of rest. By six o'clock the work of the evening has commenced. The beds are made, the ward put straight, the flowers and plants removed to the bath-room for the night. Prayers will be read at 8.30, and then, after a little final dusting, our probationer goes to her supper, and then to bed, the full blessedness of which rest no one can more truly appreciate than she. Once or twice a week there will be a lecture or a practical nursing class to attend, and some time will have to be spent on the other nights in reading up the subjects of these demonstrations or preparing for examinations. Such, in brief outline, is the typical work which the probationer has to do at the commencement of her training. The details vary most widely in different hospitals to suit the various exigencies of their management, and the different hours for the visits of the medical staff. So also vary the hours of duty, of meals, and of recreation. As the probationer becomes more experienced she is entrusted with more responsible work, but still, from first to last, her work is supervised constantly by



older and more experienced workers. After her period of training is complete, and she has obtained her certificate of efficiency, she will be perhaps promoted to the post of staff-nurse, when she will be responsible for the ward when the sister is off duty, and will, in her turn, have to overlook the probationers' work, and assist them in the right performance of it. The next step on the ladder would probably be her appointment as night superintendent, when she would have the charge of part or the whole of the hospital during the night, would be obliged to go through every ward every two or three hours to see that every night nurse was alert, and that the various directions for those who were dangerously ill were being faithfully carried out. From this she might be promoted to act as sister in charge of wards, or she might be elected matron of some other hospital, or to superintend some other branch of nursing work, or might obtain an appointment in the army, the navy, or the Indian army nursing department. Or again, at the termination of her training, she might leave her hospital, and be either sent out under its auspices to nurse better class people in their own homes, or become attached to some private nursing institution which would utilise her services in a similar manner. Or again, she might join one of the many excellent societies or institutions which send out nurses to tend the sick poor in their own homes, including that great National Department for this purpose, formed by our revered Queen from the jubilee fund subscribed by the women of England. In every branch there is room and to spare even in England, and to a far greater extent abroad, and in the outland parts of the empire, for women who not only know their work well, but are ready and willing to do it in single-hearted devotion, loyalty, and thoroughness. Such find their reward in the general gratitude and respect which they receive. Because no one must expect nursing to be profitable from a pecuniary point of view. A probationer in her first year will probably be called upon to pay a guinea a week to the hospital until a vacancy occurs for her appointment upon the regular staff, which may not be for six months or even more. Then she will only be paid from £12 to £16 a year, with uniform, and even from this will have many little expenses to meet. During the rest of her training she will probably receive about £20

a year. A staff nurse will get from £25 to £30 a year; a sister from £30 to £50, according to the size of the hospital. A matron's salary in the same way will vary from £300 and a house at our oldest and richest hospital, to £40 a year at a small country hospital. District nurses receive from £30 to £50, according to circumstances. Private nurses working at a hospital or institution may make from £30 to £60 per annum, according to the arrangements in force. Monthly nurses, where they are fortunate enough to be recommended by leading physicians and so kept in constant employment, may make as much as £120 to £150 a year, but these cases are very few and far between. Generally, it may be said that nursing is the hardest and most responsible work which women can undertake, and that it is the worst remunerated of any skilled calling now followed. Space prevents any attempt at explanation of what is, nevertheless, an undoubted fact, that despite all its hardships, all its drawbacks, all its disappointments, despite its onerous toil and its scanty pay, there is something so deeply attractive about nursing, about its immense possibilities of helping and aiding suffering humanity, about the scientific advances of the grand profession of medicine with which it is so intimately associated, and in whose work it so closely shares, that one is compelled to believe that nursing will always as now have its enthusiasts and its devotees, and moreover will, as time goes on, be ever more and more adopted by the best of womankind as the best, the highest, the most beneficent, the most womanly of all professions.

